

CHAPTER XXII. MOPO GOES TO SEEK THE SLAUGHTERER

Now Dingaan, deserting the kraal Duguza, moved back to Zululand, and built a great kraal by the Mahlabatine, which he named "Umgugundhlovu"--that is, "the rumbling of the elephant." Also, he caused all the fairest girls in the land to be sought out as his wives, and though many were found yet he craved for more. And at this time a rumour came to the ears of the King Dingaan that there lived in Swaziland among the Halakazi tribe a girl of the most wonderful beauty, who was named the Lily, and whose skin was whiter than are the skins of our people, and he desired greatly to have this girl to wife. So Dingaan sent an embassy to the chief of the Halakazi, demanding that the girl should be given to him. At the end of a month the embassy returned again, and told the king that they had found nothing but hard words at the kraal of the Halakazi, and had been driven thence with scorn and blows.

This was the message of the chief of the Halakazi to Dingaan, king of the Zulus: That the maid who was named the Lily, was, indeed, the wonder of the earth, and as yet unwed; for she had found no man upon whom she looked with favour, and she was held in such love by this people that it was not their wish to force any husband on her. Moreover, the chief said that he and his people defied Dingaan and the Zulus, as their fathers had defied Chaka before him, and spat upon his name, and that no maid of theirs should go to be the wife of a Zulu dog.

Then the chief of the Halakazi caused the maid who was named the Lily to be led before the messengers of Dingaan, and they found her wonderfully fair, for so they said: she was tall as a reed, and her grace was the grace of a reed that is shaken in the wind. Moreover, her hair curled, and hung upon her shoulders, her eyes were large and brown, and soft as a buck's, her colour was the colour of rich cream, her smile was like a ripple on the waters, and when she spoke her voice was low and sweeter than the sound of an instrument of music. They said also that the girl wished to speak with them, but the chief forbade it, and caused her to be led thence with all honour.

Now, when Dingaan heard this message he grew mad as a lion in a net, for he desired this maid above everything, and yet he who had all things could not win the maid. This was his command, that a great impi should be gathered and sent to Swaziland against the Halakazi tribe, to destroy them and seize the maid. But when the matter came on to be discussed with the indunas in the presence of the king, at the Amapakati or council, I, as chief of the indunas, spoke against it, saying that the tribe of the Halakazi were great and strong, and that war with them would mean war with the Swazis also; moreover, they had their dwelling in caves which were hard to win. Also, I said, that this was no time to send impis to seek a single girl, for few years had gone by since the Black One fell; and foes were many, and the soldiers of the land had waxed few with slaughter, half of them having perished in the marshes of the Limpopo. Now, time must be given them to grow up again, for to-day they were as a little child, or like a man wasted with hunger. Maids

were many, let the king take them and satisfy his heart, but let him make no war for this one.

Thus I spoke boldly in the face of the king, as none had dared to speak before Chaka; and courage passed from me to the hearts of the other indunas and generals, and they echoed my words, for they knew that, of all follies, to begin a new war with the Swazi people would be the greatest.

Dingaan listened, and his brow grew dark, yet he was not so firmly seated on the throne that he dared put away our words, for still there were many in the land who loved the memory of Chaka, and remembered that Dingaan had murdered him and Umhlangana also. For now that Chaka was dead, people forgot how evilly he had dealt with them, and remembered only that he was a great man, who had made the Zulu people out of nothing, as a smith fashions a bright spear from a lump of iron. Also, though they had changed masters, yet their burden was not lessened, for, as Chaka slew, so Dingaan slew also, and as Chaka oppressed, so did Dingaan oppress. Therefore Dingaan yielded to the voice of his indunas and no impi was sent against the Halakazi to seek the maid that was named the Lily. But still he hankered for her in his heart, and from that hour he hated me because I had crossed his will and robbed him of his desire.

Now, my father, there is this to be told: though I did not know it then, the maid who was named the Lily was no other than my daughter Nada. The

thought, indeed, came into my mind, that none but Nada could be so fair. Yet I knew for certain that Nada and her mother Macropha were dead, for he who brought me the news of their death had seen their bodies locked in each other's arms, killed, as it were, by the same spear. Yet, as it chanced, he was wrong; for though Macropha indeed was killed, it was another maid who lay in blood beside her; for the people whither I had sent Macropha and Nada were tributary to the Halakazi tribe, and that chief of the Halakazi who sat in the place of Galazi the Wolf had quarrelled with them, and fallen on them by night and eaten them up.

As I learned afterwards, the cause of their destruction, as in later days it was the cause of the slaying of the Halakazi, was the beauty of Nada and nothing else, for the fame of her loveliness had gone about the land, and the old chief of the Halakazi had commanded that the girl should be sent to his kraal to live there, that her beauty might shine upon his place like the sun, and that, if so she willed, she should choose a husband from the great men of the Halakazi. But the headmen of the kraal refused, for none who had looked on her would suffer their eyes to lose sight of Nada the Lily, though there was this fate about the maid that none strove to wed her against her will. Many, indeed, asked her in marriage, both there and among the Halakazi people, but ever she shook her head and said, "Nay, I would wed no man," and it was enough.

For it was the saying among men, that it was better that she should remain unmarried, and all should look on her, than that she should pass

from their sight into the house of a husband; since they held that her beauty was given to be a joy to all, like the beauty of the dawn and of the evening. Yet this beauty of Nada's was a dreadful thing, and the mother of much death, as shall be told; and because of her beauty and the great love she bore, she, the Lily herself, must wither, and the cup of my sorrows must be filled to overflowing, and the heart of Umslopogaas the Slaughterer, son of Chaka the king, must become desolate as the black plain when fire has swept it. So it was ordained, my father, and so it befell, seeing that thus all men, white and black, seek that which is beautiful, and when at last they find it, then it passes swiftly away, or, perchance, it is their death. For great joy and great beauty are winged, nor will they sojourn long upon the earth. They come down like eagles out of the sky, and into the sky they return again swiftly.

Thus then it came about, my father, that I, Mopo, believing my daughter Nada to be dead, little guessed that it was she who was named the Lily in the kraals of the Halakazi, and whom Dingaan the king desired for a wife.

Now after I had thwarted him in this matter of the sending of an impi to pluck the Lily from the gardens of the Halakazi, Dingaan learned to hate me. Also I was in his secrets, and with me he had killed his brother Chaka and his brother Umhlangana, and it was I who held him back from the slaying of his brother Panda also; and, therefore, he hated me, as is the fashion of small-hearted men with those who have lifted them up.

Yet he did not dare to do away with me, for my voice was loud in the land, and when I spoke the people listened. Therefore, in the end, he cast about for some way to be rid of me for a while, till he should grow strong enough to kill me.

"Mopo," said the king to me one day as I sat before him in council with others of the indunas and generals, "mindest thou of the last words of the Great Elephant, who is dead?" This he said meaning Chaka his brother, only he did not name him, for now the name of Chaka was blonipa in the land, as is the custom with the names of dead kings--that is, my father, it was not lawful that it should pass the lips.

"I remember the words, O King," I answered. "They were ominous words, for this was their burden: that you and your house should not sit long in the throne of kings, but that the white men should take away your royalty and divide your territories. Such was the prophecy of the Lion of the Zulu, why speak of it? Once before I heard him prophecy, and his words were fulfilled. May the omen be an egg without meat; may it never become fledged; may that bird never perch upon your roof, O King!"

Now Dingaan trembled with fear, for the words of Chaka were in his mind by night and by day; then he grew angry and bit his lip, saying:--

"Thou fool, Mopo! canst thou not hear a raven croak at the gates of a kraal but thou must needs go tell those who dwell within that he waits to pick their eyes? Such criers of ill to come may well find ill at

hand, Mopo." He ceased, looked on me threateningly awhile, and went on: "I did not speak of those words rolling by chance from a tongue half loosed by death, but of others that told of a certain Bulalio, of a Slaughterer who rules the People of the Axe and dwells beneath the shadow of the Ghost Mountain far away to the north yonder. Surely I heard them all as I sat beneath the shade of the reed-fence before ever I came to save him who was my brother from the spear of Masilo, the murderer, whose spear stole away the life of a king?"

"I remember those words also, O King!" I said. "Is it the will of the king that an impi should be gathered to eat up this upstart? Such was the command of the one who is gone, given, as it were, with his last breath."

"Nay, Mopo, that is not my will. If no impi can be found by thee to wipe away the Halakazi and bring one whom I desire to delight my eyes, then surely none can be found to eat up this Slaughterer and his people. Moreover, Bulalio, chief of the People of the Axe, has not offended against me, but against an elephant whose trumpeting is done. Now this is my will, Mopo, my servant: that thou shouldst take with thee a few men only and go gently to this Bulalio, and say to him: 'A greater Elephant stalks through the land than he who has gone to sleep, and it has come to his ears--that thou, Chief of the People of the Axe, dost pay no tribute, and hast said that, because of the death of a certain Mopo, thou wilt have nothing to do with him whose shadow lies upon the land. Now one Mopo is sent to thee, Slaughterer, to know if this tale is

true, for, if it be true, then shalt thou learn the weight of the hoof of that Elephant who trumpets in the kraal of Umgugundhlovu. Think, then, and weigh thy words before thou dost answer, Slaughterer."

Now I, Mopo, heard the commands of the king and pondered them in my mind, for I knew well that it was the design of Dingaan to be rid of me for a space that he might find time to plot my overthrow, and that he cared little for this matter of a petty chief, who, living far away, had dared to defy Chaka. Yet I wished to go, for there had arisen in me a great desire to see this Bulalio, who spoke of vengeance to be taken for one Mopo, and whose deeds were such as the deeds of Umslopogaas would have been, had Umslopogaas lived to look upon the light. Therefore I answered:--

"I hear the king. The king's word shall be done, though, O King, thou sendest a big man upon a little errand."

"Not so, Mopo," answered Dingaan. "My heart tells me that this chicken of a Slaughterer will grow to a great cock if his comb is not cut presently; and thou, Mopo, art versed in cutting combs, even of the tallest."

"I hear the king," I answered again.

So, my father, it came about that on the morrow, taking with me but ten chosen men, I, Mopo, started on my journey towards the Ghost Mountain,

and as I journeyed I thought much of how I had trod that path in bygone days. Then, Macropha, my wife, and Nada, my daughter, and Umslopogaas, the son of Chaka, who was thought to be my son, walked at my side. Now, as I imagined, all were dead and I walked alone; doubtless I also should soon be dead. Well, people lived few days and evil in those times, and what did it matter? At the least I had wreaked vengeance on Chaka and satisfied my heart.

At length I came one night to that lonely spot where we had camped in the evil hour when Umslopogaas was borne away by the lioness, and once more I looked upon the cave whence he had dragged the cub, and upon the awful face of the stone Witch who sits aloft upon the Ghost Mountain forever and forever. I could sleep little that night, because of the sorrow at my heart, but sat awake looking, in the brightness of the moon, upon the grey face of the stone Witch, and on the depths of the forest that grew about her knees, wondering the while if the bones of Umslopogaas lay broken in that forest. Now as I journeyed, many tales had been told to me of this Ghost Mountain, which all swore was haunted, so said some, by men in the shape of wolves; and so said some, by the Esemkofu--that is, by men who have died and who have been brought back again by magic. They have no tongues, the Esemkofu, for had they tongues they would cry aloud to mortals the awful secrets of the dead, therefore, they can but utter a wailing like that of a babe. Surely one may hear them in the forests at night as they wail "Ai!--ah! Ai!--ah!" among the silent trees!

You laugh, my father, but I did not laugh as I thought of these tales; for, if men have spirits, where do the spirits go when the body is dead? They must go somewhere, and would it be strange that they should return to look upon the lands where they were born? Yet I never thought much of such matters, though I am a doctor, and know something of the ways of the Amatongo, the people of the ghosts. To speak truth, my father, I have had so much to do with the loosing of the spirits of men that I never troubled myself overmuch with them after they were loosed; there will be time to do this when I myself am of their number.

So I sat and gazed on the mountain and the forest that grew over it like hair on the head of a woman, and as I gazed I heard a sound that came from far away, out of the heart of the forest as it seemed. At first it was faint and far off, a distant thing like the cry of children in a kraal across a valley; then it grew louder, but still I could not say what it might be; now it swelled and swelled, and I knew it--it was the sound of wild beats at chase. Nearer came the music, the rocks rang with it, and its voice set the blood beating but to hearken to it. That pack was great which ran a-hunting through the silent night; and now it was night, on the other side of the slope only, and the sound swelled so loud that those who were with me awoke also and looked forth. Now of a sudden a great koodoo bull appeared for an instant standing out against the sky on the crest of the ridge, then vanished in the shadow. He was running towards us; presently we saw him again speeding on his path with great bounds. We saw this also--forms grey and gaunt and galloping, in

number countless, that leaped along his path, appearing on the crest of the rise, disappearing into the shadow, seen again on the slope, lost in the valley; and with them two other shapes, the shapes of men.

Now the big buck bounded past us not half a spear's throw away, and behind him streamed the countless wolves, and from the throats of the wolves went up that awful music. And who were these two that came with the wolves, shapes of men great and strong? They ran silently and swift, wolves' teeth gleamed upon their heads, wolves' hides hung about their shoulders. In the hands of one was an axe--the moonlight shone upon it--in the hand of the other a heavy club. Neck and neck they ran; never before had we seen men travel so fast. See! they sped down the slope towards us; the wolves were left behind, all except four of them; we heard the beating of their feet; they came, they passed, they were gone, and with them their unnumbered company. The music grew faint, it died, it was dead; the hunt was far away, and the night was still again!

"Now, my brethren," I asked of those who were with me, "what is this that we have seen?"

Then one answered, "We have seen the Ghosts who live in the lap of the old Witch, and those men are the Wolf-Brethren, the wizards who are kings of the Ghosts."